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ABSTRACT

A review of research suggests that female participation in the work force in the United States creates change in the socioeconomic status of women and thus in their consumer behavior. In 1950, 25 percent of married women were in the labor force; in 1975, 44 percent worked outside the home. The increasing number of married working women has led to the combination of the mother/housewife role with employment outside the home; this affects the lifestyle of the entire family unit. However, women with a modern orientation (all responsibilities are shared by marital partners) are less likely to enjoy housekeeping activities than are women with a traditional orientation (the husband is the provider and the wife cares for home and children). Employment moderates the housekeeping views expressed by both groups, each of whom is likely to spend little time in meal preparation, for example, when employed. Other research indicates that career women consider themselves broad-minded, dominating, frank, efficient, and independent; housewives depict themselves as kind, refined, and reserved. Also, working women and women who plan to work have more of a sense of partnership with their spouses than women who remain in the home. These changes in employment and lifestyles have affected consumer behavior. For many purchases, price is less important than convenience, availability, service, and time savings. Working wives have gained more equality with their husbands in decision making, a fact that has had impact on all industries. (KC)

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CHANGING PATTERNS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ENGENDERED BY THE CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN

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There is no doubt that the status of women has changed. This change is evident in a variety of areas, including the percentage of women employed, the types of jobs held by women, the life styles of women, and the media portrayal of women. The changing status of women has led to a redefinition of the role of women, which has broad implications for marketers, as well as for society. The purpose of this paper is to examine changes which have occurred, particularly in the area of women's employment, and to discuss the impact of those changes on life styles and consumer behavior.

WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

Female participation in the labor force provides dramatic evidence of the changing social and economic status of women. During the past century the number of women in the labor force has grown from approximately 2.5 million to over 43 million. In 1880 almost 15 percent of all women age 10 and over were in the United States labor force;[1] in 1981 the labor force participation rate for women had increased to 52.1 percent of all women age 16 and over.[2]

As Table 1 shows, there has been steady growth in the number of working women, both as a percentage of all workers and as a percentage of all women. In the first half of the century, increases

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TABLE 1

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE

Year	Working Women As Percentage Of All Workers	Working Women As Percentage Of All Women	Year	Working Women As Percentage Of All Workers	Working Women As Percentage Of All Women
1890	17%	18%	1940	25%	29%
1900	18%	20%	1950	29%	34%
1910	21%	25%	1960	33%	38%
1920	20%	23%	1970	40%	43%
1930	22%	24%	1980	43%	52%

SOURCES: Barbara Sinclair Deckard, The Women's Movement, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), pp. 292, 306; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population Profile of the United States: 1981, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 374 (September 1982), p. 39.

in women's labor force participation were primarily due to economic necessity. Between 1890 and 1920 the urban population rose rapidly, and the number of immigrants grew significantly; as a result, men's wages were so low that women had to work in order for the family to survive. During the 1930's Depression, 90% of all women who worked did so for economic reasons.[3]

The labor shortage during World War II had a strong impact on women's employment, as can be seen in the following changes: "(1) a 50 percent rise in women at work, (2) a large rise in wages, (3) twice as many wives at work, (4) four times as many women in unions, and (5) a vast change in the public's attitude toward women."[4] Immediately after the war, however, many women were laid off or fired to provide jobs for veterans; the percentage of women in the

total labor force declined from 36 percent to 28 percent.[5] Although women were urged to stay home, care for children, and do their housework, more and more women entered the labor force. Since the 1950's the percentage of working women has continued to accelerate. Between 1947 and 1975 the female population grew by 52 percent; during the same period the female labor force increased by 123 percent.[6]

One of the most significant changes in women's labor force participation has been the dramatic increase of married women, both with and without children. In 1950, only 25 percent of the married women were in the labor force; by 1975, 44 percent of the married women worked outside the home.[7] Although the labor force participation rate of married women with children has increased overall, the presence of younger children is still associated with relatively lower participation rates. In 1981, married women of childbearing age with no children under the age of 18 had a participation rate of 80 percent; in comparison, those women with children 6 to 17 years old had a 66 percent participation rate and those with children under 6 years a 48 percent rate.[8]

Over the years the types of jobs performed by women have changed. A century ago, women worked in a limited number of occupations. In 1880, 86.3 percent of all women workers were employed as domestic workers, laundresses, dressmakers, milliners, agricultural workers, cotton and woolen mill operatives, teachers, and restaurant and hotel workers. Today there women working in almost every occupation.[9]

Since 1972 women have accounted for 67 percent of the total increase in employment. Of the 11.1 million increase in employed

women, 84 percent was concentrated in the following industrial groups: professional and related services; wholesale and retail trade; finance, insurance, and real estate; and manufacturing. From 1972 to 1981, women tripled their employment in the mining industry and had an 86 percent employment increase in business and repair services. Women accounted for approximately one-half the employment increase in both the managerial occupational group and in the blue-collar group.[10]

Many factors have contributed to the increase in women's labor force participation. The feminist movement, which began in the 1960's and increased in strength in the 1970's, led to a growing awareness among women of the different kinds of employment opportunities. Women realized that they had a right to satisfying, challenging jobs outside the home. Women who postponed marriage or got divorced often had to work to support themselves. Married women discovered that a second paycheck helped to maintain or improve the family's standard of living. A factor directly related to female labor force participation is the level of educational attainment; participation in the work force is highest for women with 4 or more years of college and lowest for those who do not complete high school.[11]

THE MODERN LIFE STYLE

The traditional feminine life-style was home-oriented; women played two primary roles -- housewife and mother. In those roles women were considered dependent upon their husbands and subordinate to them; incapable of understanding world issues; and interested

only in the affairs of the home, such as cooking, cleaning, decorating, and raising children. Friedan described that life style as "the feminine mystique;" she characterized the resulting female stereotype as "young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home."[12]

In 1967, 60 percent of the adult American women generally or definitely agreed with the statement: "A woman's place is in the home." However, in less than 10 years, the percentage of women agreeing with that statement had decreased to 26 percent.[13] Arnott and Bengtson pointed out reasons for the change:

> The role of "homemaker" is undervalued in the United States, where occupation is the key to the assignment of role status, and achievement and monetary value tend to provide the criteria for social ranking. In contemporary America, women tend to absorb the same values as the men with whom they are educated, and to use these men as reference persons in comparing social role rewards. Educated women in the "homemaker only" role may feel a sense of "relative deprivation" in the distribution of social status. A "homemaker-plus" role (such as the addition of employment to home duties) may promise greater social recognition.[14]

Not only does the "homemaker-plus" role increase social recognition, but it is also encouraged by contemporary society.

The increasing number of married working women has led McCall to coin the term, "workwife." The workwife "is combining two critical societal roles: mother/housewife with employment outside of the home, thus affecting the lifestyle of an entire family unit."[15] More than one-half of the female population falls in this category. In addition to having new needs, these women have less time to satisfy them.

Although many women have adopted the "homemaker-plus" role, employment status is not the sole determinant of a modern life style. In a study conducted by Reynolds, Crask, and Wells,[16] 45 percent of the respondents indicated that they preferred a traditional marriage in which the husband assumes responsibility for providing for the family and the wife runs the house and takes care of the children. A modern marriage where the husband and wife share responsibilities, including work, homemaking, and childcare, was chosen by 54 percent of the respondents. The remaining respondents chose some other arrangement, such as staying single. As Table 2 shows, women with a modern orientation tend to be younger, better educated, employed, and in a higher income bracket.

In their survey, Reynolds et al. found that women with a modern orientation are less likely to enjoy housekeeping activities and are more inclined to avoid them than are women with a traditional orientation. Modern females tend to agree that meal preparation should take as little time as possible, and they are less apt to bake from scratch. Employment status, however, serves to moderate the housekeeping views expressed both by traditional and by modern women. The traditionally-oriented working wife is more likely to believe that meal preparation should take little time and less likely to bake from scratch than is the non-working traditional wife. Reynolds et al. suggest that this demonstrates a "practical coping with realities."[17]

Modern women are more interested in looking attractive to males and in wanting to look different from others. Traditionally-oriented working women are also interested in attractiveness, but

TABLE 2

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN WOMEN

ITEM	TRADITIONAL	MODERN
AGE		
Under 25	34%	66%
25-34	36%	64%
35-44	44%	56%
45-54	48%	52%
55+	58%	42%
EDUCATION		
Some college and higher	40%	50%
High School and lower	60%	50%
EMPLOYMENT		
Employed	26%	56%
Not Employed	74%	44%
FAMILY INCOME		
Under $4,000	4%	4%
$4,000-8,000	16%	13%
$8,000-10,000	10%	10%
$10,000-15,000	32%	27%
$15,000-20,000	18%	24%
$20,000-or over	20%	22%
DWELLING UNIT		
Apartment	5%	11%
One Family Home	83%	76%
Other	12%	13%

SOURCE: Fred D. Reynolds, Melvin R. Crask, and William D. Wells, "The Modern Feminine Life Style," Journal of Marketing 41 (July 1977): 39.

their point of reference is other women. Modern women are more likely to consider themselves cosmopolitan, self-confident, and mobile. They are more financially optimistic and tend to have more liberal attitudes toward life, social change, and business.[18]

Women with a modern orientation are more likely to participate in strenuous leisure activities and to be concerned about physical conditioning. Working women, both modern and traditional, tend to engage in a greater variety of leisure activities. It is possible that their greater participation in those activities is a function of higher income levels.[19]

Since the modern life style is related to more factors than just employment status, it is important to avoid stereotyping the "working woman." Bartos[20] compared working and non-working women. Among working women, there are some who consider their work "just a job" and others who feel they have a career; among non-working housewives, some prefer to stay at home, while others plan to work in the future. In the late 1970's, approximately 63 percent of the working women fell in the "just a job" category and 37 percent in the "career" category; of the non-working housewives, 59 percent were happy at home, and 41 percent planned to work.

When Bartos examined the life styles and self-concepts of the women, she found distinct differences between the groups. The "stay at home" housewives have the lowest education level of the four groups, and the "career" working women have the highest. The "plan to work" housewives are the youngest group, and the "stay at home" housewives are the oldest group.[21]

The "career" women consider themselves broad-minded, dominating, frank, efficient, and independent; they have the strongest self-images. The "stay at home" housewives consider themselves kind, refined, and reserved; they are less likely to feel brave, stubborn, dominating or egocentric. The "plan to work" housewives have much more in common with the working women, both the "career" group and the "just a job" group. The "plan to work" housewives describe themselves as creative and affectionate; they also feel more tense, stubborn, and awkward than the other groups. The working women and the "plan to work" housewives have more of a sense of partnership with their husbands and a feeling of "family teamwork."[22]

Venkatesh has summarized the consequences of the feminist movement and its impact on life styles:

- The women's movement is both a cause and an effect of changes in the social values and in the social system.
- Life styles of women will be significantly affected, with some bearing on economic behavior of consumers at large.
- Traditional household decision making will undergo significant changes.
- The economics of the household are changing, especially in the allocation of women's time in acquiring and processing commodities.
- As a result of anticipated changes in the life styles of women, we can expect changes in the life styles of men.[23]

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The changes in women's employment status and in their life-style orientation have affected consumer behavior in a variety of ways. Changes are apparent not only in the traditionally female

areas, such as food-shopping, but also in traditionally non-female areas, such as automobile and travel purchases. The types of products purchased are different; shopping patterns have changed considerably; decision-making responsibilities have shifted.

Because employed women typically spend about 60 to 70 hours a week working at home and on the job, time is a critical variable in determining the products and services that women need.[24] For many products, price is less important than convenience, availability, service, and time savings.[25] Significant changes have occurred in food-shopping behavior. Working wives are more likely to purchase prepared foods or convenience foods, to take whatever meat is available, and to skip items on their shopping lists because they are in a hurry.[26] They also shop less often and prefer to shop in the afternoon and evening, or on Saturday and Sunday. Frequently, these women shop at convenience stores rather than at supermarkets. Working wives often delegate food-shopping duties to other members of the family -- to husbands or teenage children.[27]

Working women are more likely to buy expensive appliances and household equipment, such as microwave ovens and food processors. Their additional income allows them to justify expenditures on labor-saving devices. Working wives are more casual and less guilt-ridden about housekeeping; consequently, they tend to be less interested in choosing among household care products. The types of home furnishings selected tend to be casual and easy to maintain. Because many household duties are shared by the entire family,

traditionally female appliances, such as vacuum cleaners, have taken on a unisex image.[28]

Since advancement in business is often associated with being young, working women tend to emphasize youthful appearance. While traditional women report greater usage of lipstick and hairspray, the modern women have higher usage levels for eye makeup and sun tan lotion.[29] When selecting clothes, working wives consider not only a flattering fit, but also suitability for work. They are more likely to shop in the evenings, to use the same store for all clothing purchases, and to purchase in a department store rather than a specialty shop.[30]

The concern with youthful appearance and physical conditioning is also apparent in the leisure-time activities of working women. When asked about leisure-time activities, working wives were less likely to mention yardwork, shopping, or cooking, and more likely to mention boating, camping, and crafts. A comparison of work status and leisure-time activities shows that housewives favor home-centered activities which are social in nature, while working wives tend to be more self-centered and to engage in activities which are less social and often removed from the home.[31]

Working women have substantially increased their use of such services as life insurance, credit cards, travelers checks, airlines, rental cars, hotels, and restaurants. As an example, the proportion of United Airline's business travelers who are females increased from 4 percent in 1974 to 18 percent in 1981.[32] Among married women, the best customers for travel services and products

are the working wives with no children at home. However, the career-oriented working woman is the prime customer for travel.[33]

Working wives have gained more equality in the decision-making process; working women make more independent decisions and have less income restraints.[34] This change in decision-making responsibility from a primarily male task to a shared task has had impact upon all industries and particularly upon those which were considered male-dominated. No longer can a salesperson assume that a woman's only function in the buying process is to choose the color of a new car or refrigerator.

CONCLUSION

In our society there have been significant changes in the status of women. In increasing numbers, women have entered the work force; they have become more than "just housewives." The role of women has shifted in response to social changes and has also been a factor leading to the social changes. In addition, the changes in women's life styles have influenced and modified men's life styles.

Women constitute a major marketing force. Any change in a working wife's consumer behavior is affecting not just one person, but usually 3 or more family members.[35] Although working is not necessarily synonymous with a modern life style, it is closely related. Efforts to define consumer target markets have shown that the modern woman tends to be younger, better educated, employed, and in a higher income bracket. She needs and wants

products which are convenient to buy and to use; she is interested in goods and services which complement her cosmopolitan life style and challenge her intellectually.

ENDNOTES

[1]U.S., Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary, Women's Bureau, Job Options for Women in the 80's, Pamphlet 18 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. vi.

[2]U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population Profile of the United States: 1981, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 374 (September 1982), p. 39.

[3]Barbara Sinclair Deckard, The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), pp. 292-293.

[4]Ibid., p. 297.

[5]Ibid., p. 301.

[6]William Lazer and John E. Smallwood, "The Changing Demographics of Women," Journal of Marketing 41 (July 1977): 16.

[7]Ibid.

[8]U.S., Department of Commerce, Population Profile, p. 39.

[9]U.S., Department of Labor, Job Options, p. vi.

[10]U.S., Department of Commerce, Population Profile, pp. 2, 43-45.

[11]Lazer and Smallwood, "Changing Demographics," p. 17.

[12]Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 30.

[13]Fred D. Reynolds, Melvin R. Crask, and William D. Wells, "The Modern Feminine Life Style," Journal of Marketing 41 (July 1977): 38.

[14]Quoted in ibid.

[15]Suzanne H. McCall, "Meet the 'Workwife'," Journal of Marketing 41 (July 1977): 55.

[16]"Modern Life Style," p. 39.

[17]Ibid., p. 40.

[18]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[19]Ibid., p. 41.

[20]Rena Bartos, "The Moving Target: The Impact of Women's Employment on Consumer Behavior," Journal of Marketing 41 (July 1977): 31-37; and "What Every Marketer Should Know About Women," Harvard Business Review 56 (May/June 1978): 73-85.

[21]Bartos, "Every Marketer Should Know," pp. 76-84.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Alladi Venkatesh, "Changing Roles of Women--A Life-Style Analysis," Journal of Consumer Research 7 (September 1980): 189.

[24]"No Appreciation For The Working Wife?" Management Review 68 (September 1979): 57.

[25]Lazer and Smallwood, "Changing Demographics," p. 22.

[26]Michael Doan, "Business Shift, Its Sales Pitch For Women," U.S. News & World Report, July 6, 1981, p. 46.

[27]Lazer and Smallwood, "Changing Demographics," p. 21; and McCall, "Workwife," p. 57.

[28]"Working Wives Becoming Major Marketing Force," Advertising Age 47 (April 5, 1976): 34.

[29]Reynolds, Crask, and Wells, "Modern Life Style," p. 44.

[30]McCall, "Workwife," p. 57.

[31]Ibid., p. 58.

[32]Doan, "Business Shifts Sales Pitch," p. 46.

[33]Bartos, "Moving Target," p. 33.

[34]Lazer and Smallwood, "Changing Demographics," p. 22.

[35]McCall, "Workwife," p. 55.